

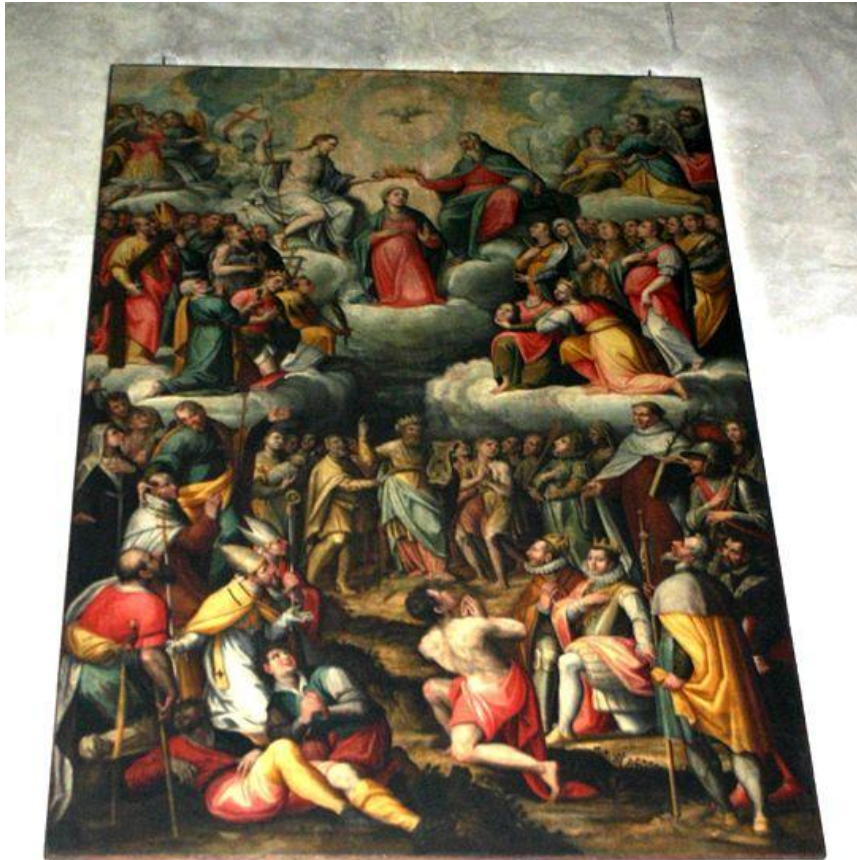


# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

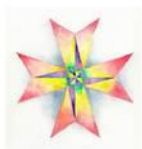
*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Doctrinal Catechesis Session  
Mary Birmingham

## SALVATION & SOTERIOLOGY



Left-side transept of [Santa Maria del Carmine](#) Church, in [Milan](#), Italy.  
[Giovanni Mauro Della Rovere](#) called "[Il Fiammenghino](#),"  
*Triumph of Paradise*. Picture by Giovanni Dall'Orto.



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you, Lord, as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.



### Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session.  
Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best  
suited for your particular group.



## Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's  
liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the **Breaking  
Open the Word** worksheet for this week.

### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

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# Sharing Human Experience

Catechist mentions this definition at the beginning:

- Soteriology means the same thing as “salvation.” *Soter* is Latin and is derived from the word “save.”

Catechist leads participants in the following exercise.

Have a little fun with this. Place two chairs in the middle of the room. Catechist gets in one chair. Catechist invites a catechumen or candidate or other participant to come and sit in the other chair. Repeat this exercise several times, so you can get various responses to your questions.

Tell them that this is not a test, so they are not to worry about what answer they give or how eloquent or simple their answer is. We are doing this exercise for a specific reason that will become a little clearer at the end of it.

Catechist begins:

- “At some point in your life, you will very likely be asked if you are saved and how you know that you are saved. How would you respond to that question?”

(Do not give any answers just try to raise questions for them—hard questions that others might ask. Have a good time with this. Make it as fun as possible. Repeat this with as many candidates as can fit in a 10 minutes period.)

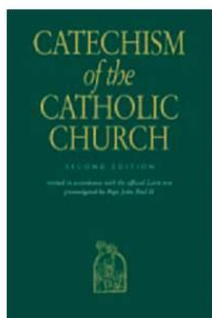
Thank them for their participation and remind them that at some point in their lives they will be called on to answer such questions. An exercise like this reminds each and every one of us (not just them—most Catholics would have a hard time with this exercise as well) that we need to be ready to affirm our faith and our belief in salvation that comes from God alone. When you present Catholic teaching, try to incorporate their responses in your presentation. Affirm any answers they gave that are in accord with Church teaching. Point out when Church teaching was not in accord with what their responses implied (gently and lovingly, however).

Catechist invites participants in the wider group to respond to the following question.

- ▶ How would you answer the following question if asked by someone coming from a fundamentalist tradition? When were you saved?

Drawing upon their responses present the following:

- ▶ Very often you might hear someone from another Church tradition tell the date and the hour he or she was saved. Catholics would never respond in such a way.
- ▶ Catholics would say that we were saved by Christ on the cross.
- ▶ When asked if we are saved, a Catholic would respond: “I certainly have hope in Christ that I am.”
- ▶ Salvation is not a sure thing. We must cooperate with God’s saving grace.
- ▶ Evidence of that cooperation and the love we have for God can be found by the way we live our lives.
- ▶ Thus, a Catholic would never say that his or her salvation is a sure bet.
- ▶ We trust in God’s merciful power, but there is a responsibility to live a life of love in response to God’s gift of salvation.
- ▶ We cannot simply say that Jesus saved us on the cross and then live according to the same old sinful patterns in life.
- ▶ We must make every effort to change our lives and live according to Jesus’ example.



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to CCC: 588; 456-457; 776; 780; 851; 1040; 1129; 1257.

- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines salvation: “The forgiveness of sins and restoration of friendship with God which can be done by God alone” (Glossary, p. 898).
- ▶ Another definition of salvation is the ultimate restoration of humanity and all creation brought about by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Restoration means that we are restored to God’s original plan for us at the beginning of the world—to live in perfect harmony and happiness with him in Paradise.
- ▶ However, because of human sin that original plan was derailed.
  - We lost our original salvation.
  - The world had to wait for Jesus Christ to enter the world stage in order for God’s original perfect harmony to be realized.
  - Only through the sacrifice of Jesus would we once again have access to the Paradise that was intended for everyone at the creation of the world.

- ▶ Salvation, therefore, is the process, the means, the way, in which this restoration of human beings is brought about in Christ.
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also tells us that “Jesus substituted his obedience for humanity’s disobedience. He offered himself for us by bearing all our sins. Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father” (CCC, 615).
- ▶ It is because of Jesus’ love for us to the very end that he ultimately gave his sacrifice redeeming value.
- ▶ It is because of Jesus’ love for us to the end that his death atoned and made satisfaction for our sins.
  
- ▶ Satisfaction is a tricky concept when it comes to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Why should he have to make satisfaction? When one thinks objectively about what satisfaction means, it would seem that satisfaction should be made by the one who commits the offense, not someone who is innocent. (We, in fact, make satisfaction when we are given a penance in the sacrament of reconciliation.)
- ▶ St. Thomas Aquinas explains this by telling us that satisfaction comes about when the maker of satisfaction (Jesus) offers to the one offended (God) something that delights him more than his hatred of the offense.
- ▶ Jesus’ self-sacrificing love and obedience, the worthiness of his life (he was, after all, both God and a human being), the utter horror of his passion and the sorrow it caused him outweighed the malice of sin.
- ▶ The satisfaction that Jesus offered on the cross is greater than the offense committed by humanity.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question with one other person (in dyads).

- ▶ If someone were to ask you how Jesus’ satisfaction offered on the cross in any way impacts your everyday life, what would you tell them?
- ▶ What does it say to you about your relationship with Jesus, or about the relationship you should seek to foster?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Summarily then, there are three reasons Jesus’ satisfaction outweighs human sin and is so incredibly powerful.
  - The greatness of his love for humanity
  - The intrinsic value of his life (his humanity and divinity)
  - The greatness of the burden he bore.
- ▶ Therefore, we of our own power cannot atone for our own sins before God.
  - How can a sinner atone for a sinner’s sins?
  - God had to send his Son who was without sin to become a human being in order to atone for our sins.
  - Jesus was God’s self-gift to us.
  - Since the Church is the body of Christ, it continues his saving work on earth. It helps bring about the reconciliation of people to Christ.
- ▶ Thus, the work of salvation can be summed up accordingly:



- Salvation is the forgiveness of humanity's sins.
- Forgiveness of sins, the reconciliation of human beings to God, is Jesus Christ's ultimate work.
- Jesus was and continues to be a reconciler.
- Jesus reconciles us to God.

## What Then Is Sin?

- ▶ Sin is the rejection of God's will and God's love.
- ▶ Sin is the freely chosen, willful evil actions of individuals such as pride, arrogance, selfishness, hatred, oppression, violence, destruction of the environment, and all the "-isms" such as racism and sexism.
- ▶ Human beings cannot in and of themselves bring about the necessary restoration in the face of such sin.
- ▶ Only Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit can accomplish this salvation.
- ▶ God's work will be brought to complete fulfillment at the end of the world. As the Bible tells us, the weeds will be separated from the wheat; the goats from the lambs.
- ▶ We are saved by Jesus Christ. However, we are required to respond to that salvation. We choose to accept it or reject it. When we accept his salvation, we live according to his example. We live a life based on love, not hatred.
- ▶ Each of us will stand before God and each of us will be judged according to the way we have lived our lives. We have either lived for love or we have not.
- ▶ The Bible tells us that we must not judge others. Since only God knows the human heart, only God knows what drives our sin; only God can judge the heart of a sinner.

Catechist shares the following story in Appendix #1 or a similar story to drive home the point that only God can judge the heart of a sinner.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ When we come before God, all our sins will be purified; and we will be transfigured.
- ▶ God not only causes salvation, God *is* salvation. God is perfect fulfillment and happiness. True salvation means we are completely fulfilled and know true peace and salvation.
- ▶ Even though the Bible portrays salvation in very vivid detail, we do not take them as descriptive reports. Heaven and hell are not "places" as we understand "place."
- ▶ Heaven is a state of being in which people will know complete and perfect happiness and union with God. There will be no more sorrow.
- ▶ Hell is a state of being in which there is anguish and separation from God.
- ▶ When we hear graphic details of what heaven and hell are like, they are not intended to give us an actual image as in a video. Rather, they are intended to invite our participation in the reality. The images given to us are to be taken seriously, but not literally. Such images remind us that throughout life our every-day decisions do matter.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

Catechist shares a story from his or her life or invites a parishioner to come and share his or her responses to this question before we ask the catechumens and candidates to do so. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Since our life on earth is a rehearsal for our life in eternity, can you describe what gives you perfect fulfillment and happiness here on earth and what gives you complete anguish and sorrow?
- ▶ Even though salvation comes from God, we nevertheless respond to the freely given salvation that is ours.
- ▶ In what way might we cooperate with God's saving grace in our lives and thus bring more happiness and fulfillment to our lives in preparation for our eternal life?
- ▶ What are the obstacles to such happiness and fulfillment in your life right now?

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Are Catholics the only ones who are saved? Is there salvation outside of the Catholic Church?**

- "Membership in the Catholic Church is neither a requirement nor a guarantee of salvation."<sup>1</sup> Catholics from the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965 believed that only Catholics were saved.
- The Church never definitively taught that membership was absolutely necessary for salvation.
- The Second Vatican Council restored the belief that any person who honestly, worked hard to live a good life, to follow God's will as they understood it, can be saved (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church #14).
- A recent document of the Church insisted that people from other traditions and the people just described (those who do the will of God) are saved in and through the reconciling work of Christ in the Church. Even if they are not official members, they are nevertheless part of the saving mission of the Church itself.
- Baptized Christians from other ecclesial Churches are in a unique way members of the Catholic Church since all such Churches subsist in the Catholic Church. They are linked to the Catholic Church through baptism. The Church admits that some of the same saving elements do exist in other Churches. They are "in some real way joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also he gives gifts and graces, and is thereby at work among them with his sanctifying power..." (Constitution on the Church, #15).
- Another way to express salvation existing inside the Catholic Church is to affirm that Catholics, hierarchy and the faithful, believe that the fullest riches of the Church for the salvation of souls exist within the Catholic Church, those elements of Catholic faith and life that assist us in the ongoing work of salvation. One element, for example, is the ongoing liturgical life of the Church, especially the

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Nilson in *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. McBrien, 1158.

Eucharist, which ultimately nourishes us and strengthens us on the journey of life and is therefore salvific. Other elements of Catholic faith and life that assist us in the ongoing work of salvation is our common faith and the grand organizational structure that guides faithful souls who journey the road to salvation throughout their lives

## How Are We Saved Today?

- ▶ Even Jesus himself said that baptism is necessary for salvation. That is why the Church's mission to evangelize the world is so important. That is why we should all be diligent in sharing the good news of salvation with others.
- ▶ However, having said that, the Church does insist that salvation is open for others who through no fault of their own are not baptized.
- ▶ People who die because of their faith in Christ are considered baptized in blood. Their baptism was one of desire.
- ▶ The Second Vatican Council affirmed that God-loving Jews and Muslims are also opened to saving power of God as well because of living righteous, God-fearing, God-loving lives. God's tent is large and anyone who has a desire for God and a desire for baptism enjoys the effects of the grace of baptism (CCC, 1257).
- ▶ "Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity" (CCC, 1260).
- ▶ Catechumens who die before baptism if they are sincere in their love of God and their desire to be baptized and live a life of charity are assured of the baptism that they were not able to receive because of their death.

Catechist invites participants to response to the following questions.

- ▶ What did you learn about the mystery of salvation today?
- ▶ If you were asked to tell someone some "really good news" about Jesus and the Church that we shared today, what would that good news be?

Povolzhie school, 16th c.  
Raising the Crucifixion.  
Public domain.







## Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to an experience in their lives. Catechist shares an experience from his or her life and invites others to do the same.

- Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation.

The implications of salvation are that we cooperate with God's saving work. We respond through faith and action. What is taking place in the parish this week that challenges you to take action?

For example, "This week our parish is supporting the new shelter for homeless women and children. Our parish is providing the financial and humanitarian help. The center needs help with renovations but also with clients who need the help of people with skill and expertise in working with such situations. Let us meet at the shelter this Monday evening."



## Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person.

- In what way does this teaching on salvation challenge you and the Christian community?
- What are the implications?
- If salvation requires we cooperate with God's saving grace, where is salvation most needed in your life?
- From what behaviors, attitudes or actions do you need to be saved?
- What are you willing to commit to do in response to your reflection on the word and Church teaching regarding salvation?

Perhaps persons commit to a specific Spiritual and Corporal Work of Mercy in response to God's call.

## Journal

Question for your journal this week: From what do I need to be saved? What is my greatest need for salvation at this time in my life? In what way am I presently cooperating (or not) with God's saving grace?



## Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA #90-97.

Option 2: Intercessions, Doxology, Opening Prayer B: #14, Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, Sacramentary. “For the Spread of the Gospel”

## APPENDIX

#1. A dear friend of mine embezzled money, killed the person who could testify against her, and then supposedly took her own life. It would appear that this woman's grievous sin could not and was not reconciled since she took her own life making it appear as though she was unrepentant.

However, the Bible and our Church teaches that we are not to judge and that God is merciful. This woman spent an entire life loving God and caring for God's people. Only God knows what drove her actions at the end of her otherwise exemplary life. Only God can judge.

This gives me great consolation, because the world automatically assumes that my dear friend went straight to hell. When well-meaning Christians called the diocese objecting to the funeral she received, a very wise priest told them that we do not judge the entirety of a person's life by one evil action. God is so merciful that we must not judge others, lest we be condemned ourselves. Only God knows if this woman's actions were a willful, fully cognizant action on the part of the person committing the action.

On the other hand, she is a reminder to all of us that we must be diligent in our response to God's love and mercy. We must do our very best to live our lives according to God's will.

#2. As a mother of four and grandmother to three, I find great fulfillment in the lives of my children and grandchildren. I am never more fulfilled than when we gather together to pray the Blessing Cup Prayer as we have for the past 40 years of family life. We blessed and committed our lives to God each time we gathered for birthdays, for Christmas, for Advent, for Easter. We celebrated our common bond with each other and with our God as we gathered to pray the Blessing Cup at events such as the marriages of our daughters, the deployment of our son-in-law, the birth of our grandchildren, the burial of our favorite family pet. Every event of our lives has been sacramentalized and blessed by our common prayer.

I am never more at peace and fulfilled as when our family and now our extended family demonstrate our love for one another and our love for and trust in God. I am never more in anguish as when we experience the severe illness of any of our members. When our faith and trust is tested, it causes great anguish. Yet still we are aware that God walks with us in the events of life. When chaos begins its opening act, I am tempted to doubt, which also causes deep anguish. God continues to save me. I am invited to ever-deeper conversion in my life, to truly let go. I am called to practice self-emptying, known as *kenosis*, to abandon my life to God's care. The extent to which I am willing to embrace the grace necessary to abandon my life is the extent to which I am most fulfilled. So often, I fall into the trap of trying to save myself or second-guess God. The latter is always my biggest obstacle. Peace only comes through submission of my will to God.

## Handout on Salvation and Soteriology

- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines salvation: “The forgiveness of sins and restoration of friendship with God which can be done by God alone” (Glossary, p. 898).
- ▶ Another definition of salvation is the ultimate restoration of humanity and all creation brought about by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Restoration means that we are restored to God’s original plan for us at the beginning of the world—to live in perfect harmony and happiness with him in Paradise.
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  - Since the Church is the body of Christ, it continues his saving work on earth. It helps bring about the reconciliation of people to Christ.
- ▶ Thus, the work of salvation can be summed up accordingly:
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